

The Trial That Wasn't

For years, James Earl Ray has asked to be tried for the murder of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Last week, Dr. King's widow, Coretta Scott King, echoed the call for a full trial. Mrs. King said it would be a catharsis for the nation and might shed light on unanswered questions. "We call for the trial that never happened," she said. But not for Mr. Ray's reasons.

Critically ill with a liver ailment, Mr. Ray wants to clear his name. He confessed to the killing, pleaded guilty and in 1969 was sentenced to 99 years in prison. But he says that a trial will prove that the bullet that killed Dr. King didn't come from the rifle that was found with his fingerprints near the site of the slaying in Memphis.

The rifle with Ray's fingerprints.



Without granting a trial, Judge Joseph Brown, of Shelby County Criminal Court in Memphis, agreed to ask an appeals court to decide whether new tests should be done on the bullet.